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Immigration lawyer David Bitel to stand trial over allegations he raped, assaulted asylum seeker clients

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A prominent Sydney immigration lawyer has been committed to stand trial over allegations that he raped and indecently assaulted six male asylum seekers whom he was meant to be representing.

After a marathon committal hearing which ran sporadically over the course of six months, David Bitel was on Monday committed to the District Court to face 18 charges, including multiple charges of sexual intercourse without consent and indecent assault.

The six alleged victims of the abuse, who cannot be named, are of Nepalese, Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi origin and were seeking asylum in Australia at the time the alleged incidents occurred.

The hearing was told that the alleged sexual and indecent assaults by Mr Bitel, 63, took place between 1995 and 2008 when the men came to his Sydney office to discuss their claims for asylum.

The assaults allegedly included oral sex and fondling the men's genitals.

Mr Bitel has pleaded not guilty to the charges, with his barrister, Murugan Thangaraj, SC, asserting that the complainants had colluded against their former lawyer.

This alleged collusion took place either directly between the men, or through a rival immigration lawyer.

But Downing Centre Local Magistrate Kate Thompson did not accept that there was sufficient evidence of this to prevent the matter proceedings to trial, finding that there was a "reasonable prospect that a jury, if properly informed, could convict the accused".

However, she did not commit Mr Bitel to stand trial on a further two charges which arose from allegations made by one of his alleged victims during cross-examination.

Facing trial: David Bitel. PAUL HARRIS

She found that these allegations had been "vague and unclear" and that the alleged victim had not provided a convincing explanation as to why he had not told police about the alleged incidents earlier.

Mr Bitel is undergoing intensive cancer treatment and will begin a round of chemotherapy on Tuesday.

He is due to be arraigned in the Downing Centre District Court on May 1, at which point it is expected a trial date will be set.

Paul Bibby is a Court Reporter for The Sydney Morning Herald. Connect via Twitter or email.